

**Testimony for
Little Hoover Commission Hearing
Thursday, January 25, 2001**

Raising the Stature of Teaching

Labor has played and continues to play an important role in resolving problems confronting the teaching profession and in making teaching a more appealing career choice. The AFT in California and nationally have consistently called for approaches to professionalize teaching, including but not limited to:

- high standards for entry into the profession, combining pedagogical and subject-matter preparation,
- high standards for the profession itself, contained in the California Standards for the Teaching Profession,
- peer assistance and review,
- high-quality professional development,
- competitive salaries and working conditions,
- support for new teachers, and
- teacher collaboration in instructional decision-making.

In today's market, schools will never be able to compete with dot-com start-ups, but can, hand in hand with labor, attract individuals interested in a satisfying career that focuses on something larger than the corporate bottom line.

Collaborating for Teacher Improvement.

As an organization, the CFT has worked on the teacher recruitment initiatives of the last decade. The CFT promotes "educationally sound" contracts, which seek the goal of balancing traditional collective bargaining practices with local educational needs.

The California Federation of Teachers has always supported peer review, and has helped foster excellent implementation of California's Peer Assistance and Review law. Under that statute, administrators and teachers work together to support the classroom performance of new teachers and improve the classroom performance of struggling veterans.

The Poway Federation of Teachers has had a peer review and assistance program since the early 1980s, made possible by a trust agreement addition to the collective bargaining contract with the Poway Unified School District. The Lompoc Federation of Teachers and Lompoc Unified School District completed a

similar agreement at that time. The mutual goal is teachers' effective classroom performance.

AFT locals around the state also work to support student achievement not only through improvement of classroom practice (peer assistance and review) but also through joint efforts on specific goals, such as literacy. For example, the ABC District in Los Angeles County has joined with the ABC Federation of Teachers and the American Federation of Teachers to establish a literacy project using proven learning programs. The mutual goal is student achievement.

There are many such districts where the relationship between employer and employees is collaborative, supportive, mutually respectful. These places are limited in what they can do only by the chronic underfunding of the education system in California.

Rewarding the Best Performing Teachers

Teachers in California have worked under collective bargaining for 25 years; it is time to stop blaming the collective bargaining process for problems related to teacher quality-or anything else, for that matter. Organizations interested in the best working conditions for their members and the best learning conditions for their students do not seek to discourage improved teacher performance. To a manager who believes that collective bargaining somehow hinders his or her ability to reward effective teachers or eliminate inept ones, we would say read the employee-employer contract, know the law, work with your local union.

Another difference between today and 25 years ago, in addition to the absence of collective bargaining, is California's national ranking in education funding. Twenty-five years ago California was number one. Today we're very appreciative of the influx of money during the past few years, but as we climb up from the 48th ranking, we still operate under the expectation that all of California's students will perform above the national average on nationally-normed tests.

California law already allows local bargaining of "knowledge and skill-based" salary schedules, schedules whereby increases in remuneration derive from factors other than education and experience. Districts in Colorado and Ohio have begun working with these new kinds of salary schedules. However, we believe that the best rewards for effective teachers have less to do with money than with support for her or her efforts, a well-run school, and a coherent instructional program. Unions and administrations can work together to make sure their schools foster high levels of classroom performance. Those schools, those great places to work, will be more likely to attract and keep high quality teachers.

In conclusion, we support the efforts the state has made over the last five years to recruit teachers, including most recently the efforts at recruitment of out-of-state teachers contained in AB877 (Scott). We support improvements of the retirement system-without a retirement at least equivalent to other public employees, the system cannot keep teachers for the long term. We support

assistance to individuals who would like to become well-prepared teachers, such as forgivable loans and the governor's new Teaching Fellowship Program. We support high standards of academic and pedagogical preparation for teachers-not one or the other. We support peer review including final retention recommendations. We support the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as part of the "learning-to-teach" continuum, and support teachers receiving extra money for certification as negotiated through collective bargaining.

At this time in California education, doing relatively little might accomplish the most. The education community has taken on a great deal in the last two years-it's time to work on the implementation of all those new initiatives, rather than tackle new ones. Assessment including the looming high school exit exam, peer assistance and review, elimination of social promotion, serving language learners, staffing challenges-all offer local districts plenty to occupy themselves with. We recommend, instead of more new initiatives, a focus on building the collaborative capacities of districts, administrators and teachers to reach the most important goal-that of high achievement for all students.

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